DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 460 CG 018 616

AUTHOR Tolan, Patrick H.
TITLE Normal Adolescent Development and Delinquency Proness Prediction.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (93rd, Los Angeles, CA, August 23-27, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescent Development; Adolescents; *Behavior Patterns; *Delinquency; *Delinquency Causes; *Developmental Tasks; Family Relationship; Interpersonal Relationship; Vocational Interests

ABSTRACT

The concept of juvenile court and juvenile delinquency as distinct from adult crime is grounded in the idea of allowing adolescents more consideration because they are not quite adults, cognitively, psychologically, or socially. These developmental progressions within the individual and complementary societal changes in how the individual is viewed suggest that adolescent development and delinquency may be tied. A normative sample of 337 adolescent males, aged 11-18, is used to present a set of analyses of patterns of delinquent behavior and psychosocial correlates to this behavior. Data on delinquent behavior patterns are presented which indicate that most delinquency is transient and often limited to the adolescent years. Results of correlational analyses of the relationship of delinquent behaviors across three stages of adolescence for three areas - family relations, social relations, and vocational orientation - are also presented. Longitudinal studies of continuing and discontinuing delinquents and studies of relatively effective interventions are briefly noted. It is concluded that, although the analyses are preliminary, the findings indicate that for many adolescents delinquent behavior may be related to normal developmental tasks. (MCF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED263460

Normal Adolescent Development and Delinquency Proness Prediction

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patrick H. Tolan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG018616

Patrick H. Tolan, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology, DePaul University

Chicago, IL 60614

Presented as part of the symposium "Adolescence and Delinquency: Developmental Considerations" at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, 1985.

Abstract

This presentation reviews commonly identified developmental tasks of adolescence and examines their relationship to transient delinquent behavior during adolescence. Utilizing a normative sample of adolescent males, a set of analyses of patterns of delinquent behavior and psychosocial correlates to this behavior are presented. Although preliminary in nature these analyses indicate that for many adolescents delinquent behavior may be related to struggles with normal developmental tasks such as social relations, separation from parental-child relationships, and development of vocational interests.

Central to most explanations of adolescent development is the idea that a primary developmental task of this age period is to integrate numerous "aspects" of ones' self into a cohesive identity (Conger & Peterson, 1984). Erikson (1968) suggest this process is a matter of integrating and internalizing social mores and roles modeled by admired others into one's own identity. In effect, the central task of this age is to move from childhood, a time with few social responsibilities and a self-centered orientation to adulthood with full social responsibility for one's self and a concordant ability to be concerned about the wellbeing of others is present.

There are several significant developmental shifts associated with the adolescent years. As manifested in our culture at this time, three areas of psychological functioning are the primary indicants of the process of change during adolescence: 1) increasing independence from the parents with greater self direction and control expected, 2) movement toward heterosexual social relationships, with an initial orientation toward peer groups and then to dyadic relationships, and 3) development of vocational goals and pursuit of appropriate training. Thought to accompany these psycho-social indicants of change are qualitative changes in cognitive functioning with the development of formal operations and thus the ability to consider abstract principles apart from their concrete or practical applications and in moral reasoning, with movement from the moral reasoning of childhood

which is based on compliance and obedience to authority to "postconventional morality" which entails an internalized set of guiding principles (Elkind, 1980). How smoothly and fully these tasks are completed varies, and the variation apparently relates to psychosocial functioning (Offer & Offer, 1975).

In a complimentary fashion, the adolescent years are a time when society and the legal system (as one societal institution) change their presumptive view of the individual from an irresponsible child to a responsible adult. In fact, the juvenile court's origin was based in recognizing the "in-betwwen" state of adolescents vis-a-vis individual legal responsibility (McCarthy & Carr, 1980). The concept of juvenile court and juvenile delinquency as distinct from adult crime is grounded in the idea of allowing adolescents more consideration because they are not quite adults, cognitively, psychologically, or socially.

These developmental progressions within the individual and the complimentary societal change in how the individual is viewed suggests that adolescent development and delinquency may be intimately tied. This is the focus of my presentation today.

However, before proceeding, it is important that I mention several qualifications of what I will present today. First, rather than attempt to unravel the complex issues of historical and cultural effects on adolescent development I am limiting my considerations to adolescent development within our present historico-cultural context. Second, for the most part delinquency

research (and for that matter much of developmental research) has utilized male samples much more than female or mixed samples. The sample I used for the data I will present today was all males. This was done because the available research suggest both development and delinquency patterns differ in some significant ways between genders. Therefore, because of my sample and the delinquency and developmental research it is based on, my remarks today pertain mostly to males, with their implications for females more limited and less clear. Finally, this presentation, and the panel for that matter is preliminary and concerned with some initial investigations of the relationship between adolescent development and delinquency. My remarks should be taken with that consideration in mind. With those qualifiers in mind, there are three main types of evidence that can suggest delinquency is related to normal adolescent development.

Delinquent Behavior Patterns

First, a review of patterns of delinquent behavior (using self-reports) indicates that it is endemic to adolescence (Rutter & Giller, 1984). Prevalence patterns suggest for the most part that delinquent behavior is not common in early adolescence, develops to almost universal prevalence during midadolescence, peaks during mid to late adolescent years, and decreases continuously beyond late adolescence (Empey, 1978; Rutter & Giller, 1984).

For example, from my sample of 337 males, ages 11 to 18, a

review of the mean frequency of acts by age groups indicates that their is a rise in the mean number of offense for each succeeding age group up until age 17.

(Chart 1 about here)

A second analyses of these patterns was performed to eliminate the effect of the extremely frequent delinquency of some of the subjects. The percentage of the subjects in each age group that reported some delinquent act was calculated. As can be seen in Chart 2, these prevalence patterns closely follow the adolescent years, with about 15% reporting some delinquent behaivor at age 11, increasing to a peak of about 85% by age sixteen and diminishing to 42% by age 18.

(Chart 2 about here)

As these charts suggest and as has been found by several other researchers, most delinquency is transient and often involvement is limited to the middle adolescent years. Their delinquency diminishes as a matter of course (Knight & West, 1975; Tolan, 1985). Even among those reporting serious and frequent delinquent behavior, most will discontinue this behavior by the end of adolescence or shortly after its end. Only a small portion of delinquents continue their criminal and antisocial behavior

beyond adolescence (West & Farrington, 1973).

Delinquent Behavior and Adolescent Developmental Issues

The second type of evidence to support the relationship between adolescence and delinquency is from examination of how indicators of psychological concerns related to adolescence differ in their relationships to delinquency at different points in adolescence. It would be expected that if delinquency is related to development then its occurrence in the early, middle, and late stages would be related to issues specific to that stage of adolescence. Correlational analyses were performed to examine the hypothesized differences in relationships of delinquent behavior across three stages of adolescence for three areas, mentioned earlier as major areas of adolescent development: family relations, social relations, and vocational orientation.

Family relations. In the area of family relations, according to theory, adolescence is characterized by a general movement away from direct (or infantile) parental control of the child toward a more equal relationship with more independence and self-control on the part of the adolescent. The first type of struggle in this area is usually an issue of control in early adolescence. Whereas the early adolescent is likely to be focused on this issue, by middle to late adolescence family relations issues are more broad concerns such as family orientation and moral and ethical values. Secondarily, level of general family organization and conflict can be important at any point (Tolan, Cromwell, & Braswell, 1985).

These aspects of family relations were measured by use of the Moos Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos & Moos, 1981). The FES has ten subscales, each thought to correspond to a different aspect of the family as a social environment. It was hypothesized that problems in each of several areas of family relations as indicated by different subscales would correlate to level of reported delinquent behavior during the stage(s) of their primacy as described above. As can be seen in Table 1, in early adolescence frequency of delinquency is significantly related to level of control only, whereas by midadolescence several subscales are related. Most noteably, subscales related to moral and ethical values and family systemic organization (e.g., level of conflict, cohesion, and organization) emerge as significant while control's relationship is no longer significant. By late adolescence only family cohesion and conflict level and moral-religious emphasis remain significantly correlated to delinquent behavior. Thus, as hypothesized, the aspects of family relations expected to be primary correlated with delinquency during the respective stages.

(Place table 1 about here)

Social relations. Two measures of social relations were included for these analyses: social skills self-efficacy (Pentz, 1983) and number of friends. Social skills self-efficacy, as

measured here, is essentially degree of confidence that one could provide assertive responses in four types of social situations (peers, parents, teachers, and strangers). This measure provides five scores, one for each type of situation, and an average across-situational score. According to developmental theory, it would be expected that among younger adolescents, a peer group orientation would predominate social relations with social skill level vis-a-vis peers significantly correlated to level of delinquent behavior. The parent situation score was expected to become significantly related in mid-adolescence when one's ability to relate to parent's autonomously is a central concern. Finally, it was expected that by late adolescence, it would be general social skill level that related to delinquent behavior, with those having less overall skill most delinquent. This latter stage is seen as the time when general social functioning ability emerges integratively. Thus, the hypothesis of the effect of general level.

However, as can be seen in Table 1, these hypotheses were not fully supported. Social skills self efficacy with peers was not significantly related to level of delinquency for any of the three age groups. Similarly, average level did not emerge as significant in late adolescence as predicted. However, social skill in the parent situations becomes significant during middle adolescence and remained so during late adolescence.

As to friendships, developmental theory suggests a course

from a peer group orientation with involvement with large numbers of people in early adolescence toward fewer "friends" and a more dyadic orientation in middle and late adolescence. Thus, it was expected that although number of friends would not distinguish delinquency levels in early adolescence, by middle and late adolescence, reporting a large number of friends was expected to significantly correlate to higher delinquency levels. As Table 1 shows the correlations were not significant at any stage. In fact, the trend is toward a lower number of friends relating. These results could be due to the crude measure used. It may be more important to emphasize the quality of peer bonds rather than simply asking the number of friends (Hirschi, 1969). Also, the lack of friendships may be a more salient characteristic than developmental differences in peer orientation.

Vocational orientation. Douvan and Adelson's (1966) landmark study of adolescent development reported that for males, having vocational plans and how well these plans were formulated were major indicators of adjustment. Similarly, Offer (Offer & Offer, 1975) has reported that over the twenty-five years of his study of normal adolescents, vocational planning and achievement has been the most common value of adolescents. A major tenet of Hirschi's (1969) theory of delinquency as a bonding problem is that delinquency's occurence is in part the result of a lack of intrinsic valuing of academic and vocational goals. These studies indicate the importance of development of vocational interest and

formulation of realistic plans for pursuing that interest as indicants of adequate adolescent development.

A crude measure used by me to tap this area was to ask adolescents about their plans for the future. The survey item tapping this information was set up such that answers could be considered as to type of future plan as well as how well defined the plans were. This was done by dichotomizing answers into plans for more training or education versus others (to indicate what type of plan) and dichotomizing plans into categories indicating plans were specifically defined or were not (the latter category included those who indicated they did not know what they planned to do).

It was hypothesized that a lack of certainty about one's plans would only emerge as significant in late adolescence; early and middle adolescents would be expected to be either just formulating or preformulation of specific plans. However, it was expected that an idea of the general type of plan for the future would be developed early in adolescence and would correlate at each stage (e.g., whether or not you were interested in a vocation that required more education or training). As can be seen in Table 1, these hypotheses were supported. Type of plan correlates with level of delinquent behavior throughout adolescence, whereas a lack of a specific plan is significantly related only during late adolescence.

Thus, these analyses, for the most part, indicate that in the

primary developmental areas of family relations, social relations, and vocational orientation delinquent behavior at different stages of adolescence is related to developmental issues of that stage for many adolescents. This investigation's indicants are basic and some are rather rough. Therefore, their power is limited and this data is preliminary only. Also, developmental change cannot account for all delinquency, and those who are chronically delinquent need to be distinguished from transient delinquents. It is likely different correlates to their delinquency will be found (Tolan, 1985). More extended measurement and cross validation is needed before specific conclusions can be drawn.

Some concurrence and further direction can be drawn from longitudinal studies of continuing and discontinuing delinquents and of studies of relatively effective interventions with delinquents. This is the third type of evidence I want to mention.

Evidence From Longitudinal and Outcome Studies

A specific and thorough review of either longitudinal studies of delinquency or of outcome studies of interventions would require much more time than is available today, and would stray from the present concern. Threfore, I shall mention summarily a few pertinent highlights. First, from studies of discontinuing delinquency, it has been shown that psycho-social changes in developmentally critical areas such as decreasing involvement with peer groups, development of a serious romantic relationship, and

development of vocational oppurtinities or interest are often related to discontinuing delinquency and cited as reasons by those discontinuing (Knight & West, 1975). Thus, developmental progression seems related to decreased delinquency. Similarly, the comparatively effective interventions seem to have in common a focus of enhancing progress developmentally by practical aid and training in social skill, family relations, and vocational training and opportunity (Gold & Petronio, 1980). It seems that by aiding more normative development, delinquency can be diminished.

Conclusions

When one pieces together divergent evidence regarding patterns of delinquent behavior a continuity that seems to emerge is that adolescent development and the exhibition of delinquent behavior are closely tied. It appears that for many adolescents, delinquent behavior is transient and developmental.

It seems plausible to interpret this evidence within Erikson's (1968) concept of "psycho-social moratorium", which he describes as a societal function of accommodating the adolescent's experimentation with social roles by "trying them on" in a manner he describes as similar to trying on a number of coats in a store before finding one that looks and fits best. The momentary wearing of the coat is not taken seriously to indicate particular predilictions or ownership. Similarly, our society does not give full credence to adolescents' delinquency, and therefore does not

hold them fully responsible. Thus, given the avenues for such experimentation available, perhaps one manifestation of development for many adolescents is to struggle with abiding by laws and to test out social rules to adjust one's attitude toward these rules, and integrate concurrence with the values implied in those rules, in order to move from child-like obedience to imposed authority to a more adult-like valuing of the principles of laws. Developmental transient delinquent behavior may be the behavioral experimentation with these issues. Similarly, given the cognitive development in adolescence of the ability to "think about possibilities" in ways never experienced prior to this age, it may be that one tries on, or plays with different political, social, or moral views (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) as part of development. One byproduct may be to play around with legal values and conformity to social convention, which can manifest as delinquent behavior.

These plausible interpretations are based on preliminary research. This prohibits more elaborate conclusions. The present status of this view is that it seems promising.

References

Conger, J.J. & Peterson, A.C. (1984). Adolescence and youth: Psychological development in a changing world (3rd edition). New York: Harper & Row.

Douvan, E., & Adelson, J. (1966). The adolescent experience. New York: Wiley.

Elkind, D. (1980). Strategic interactions in early adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), Handbook of adolescent psychology. New York: Wiley.

Empey, L.T. (1978). American delinquency: Its meaning and construction. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Erikson, E. (1968). Identity, youth, and crisis. New York: W.W. Norton.

Gold, M. & Petronio, R.J. (1980). Delinquent behavior in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.); Handbook of adolescent psychology. New York: Wiley.

Hirschi, T. (1969). Causes of delinquency. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Inhelder, B. & Piaget, J. (1958). The growth of logical thinking from childhood to adolescence. New York: Basic Books.

Knight, D. & West, D.J. (1975). Temporary and continuing delinquency. British Journal of Criminology.

McCarthy, F.B. & Carr, J.G. (1980). Juvenile law and its process. New York: Merrill Co., Inc.

Moos, R.J. & Moos, B.S. (1981). Family Environment Scale manual.

Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologist Press.

Offer, D. & Offer, J. (1975). From teenagehood to young manhood. New York: Basic Books.

Pentz, M.A. (1983). Transition proneness: The effect of grade, school, and family changes on adolescent drug use. Grant proposal, National Institute of Drug Abuse. Grant 1RO1 DA2630-01A1.

Rutter, M.C., & B. Giller, H. (1984). Juvenile delinquency: Trends and perspectives. New York: Guilford Press.

Tolan, P.H. (1985). Age of onset and delinquency risk: Implications for three groups. Submitted for publication.

Tolan, P.H., Cromwell, R.E., & Brasswell, M. (1985). The application of family therapy to juvenile delinquency: A critical review of the literature. Submitted for publication.

West, D.J. & Farrington, D.P. (1977). The delinquent way of life. London: Heinemann.

CHART 1

MEAN NUMBER OF
DELINQUENT ACTS BY AGE GROUPS

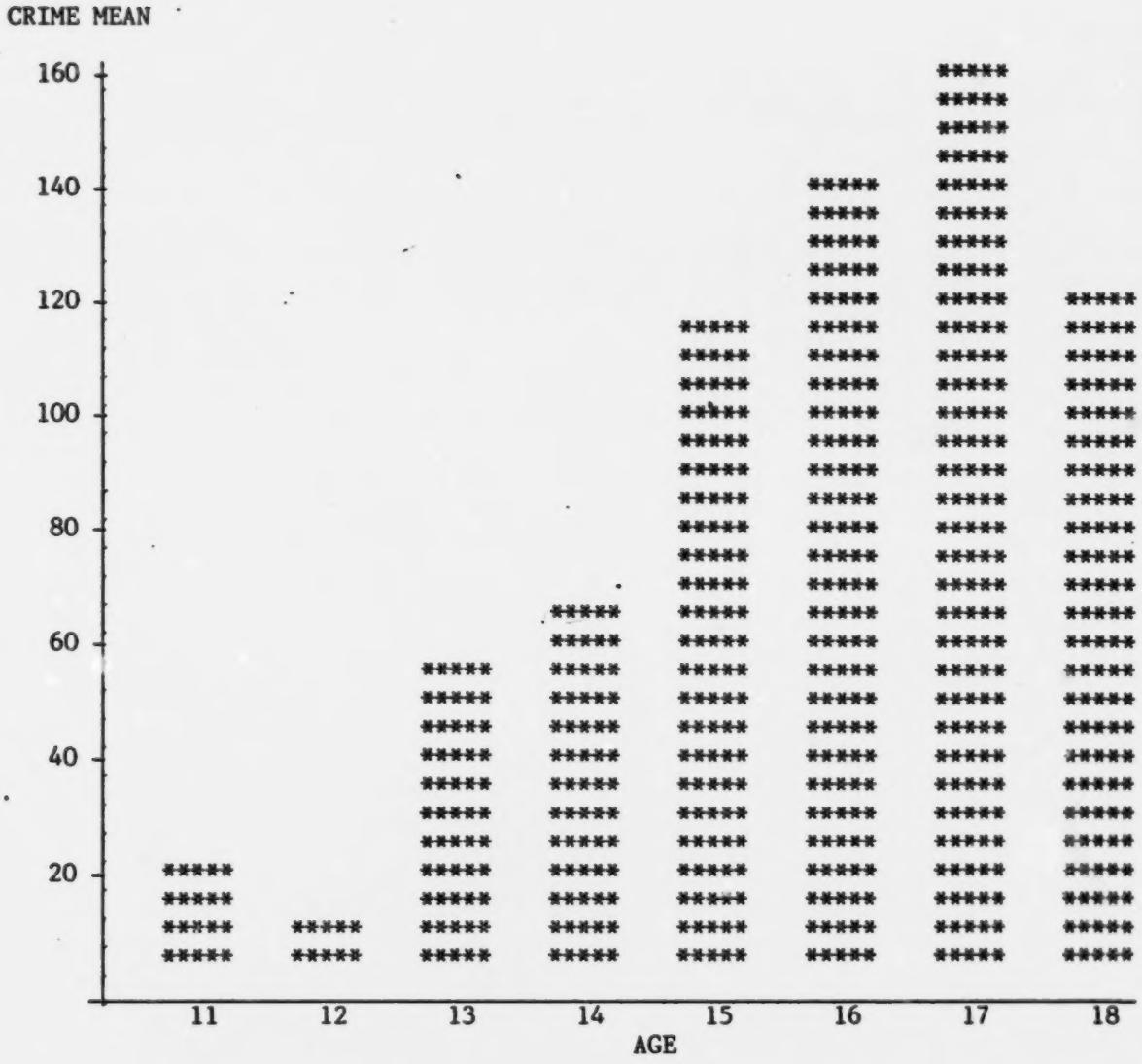

CHART 2

PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE REPORTING ANY
DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR

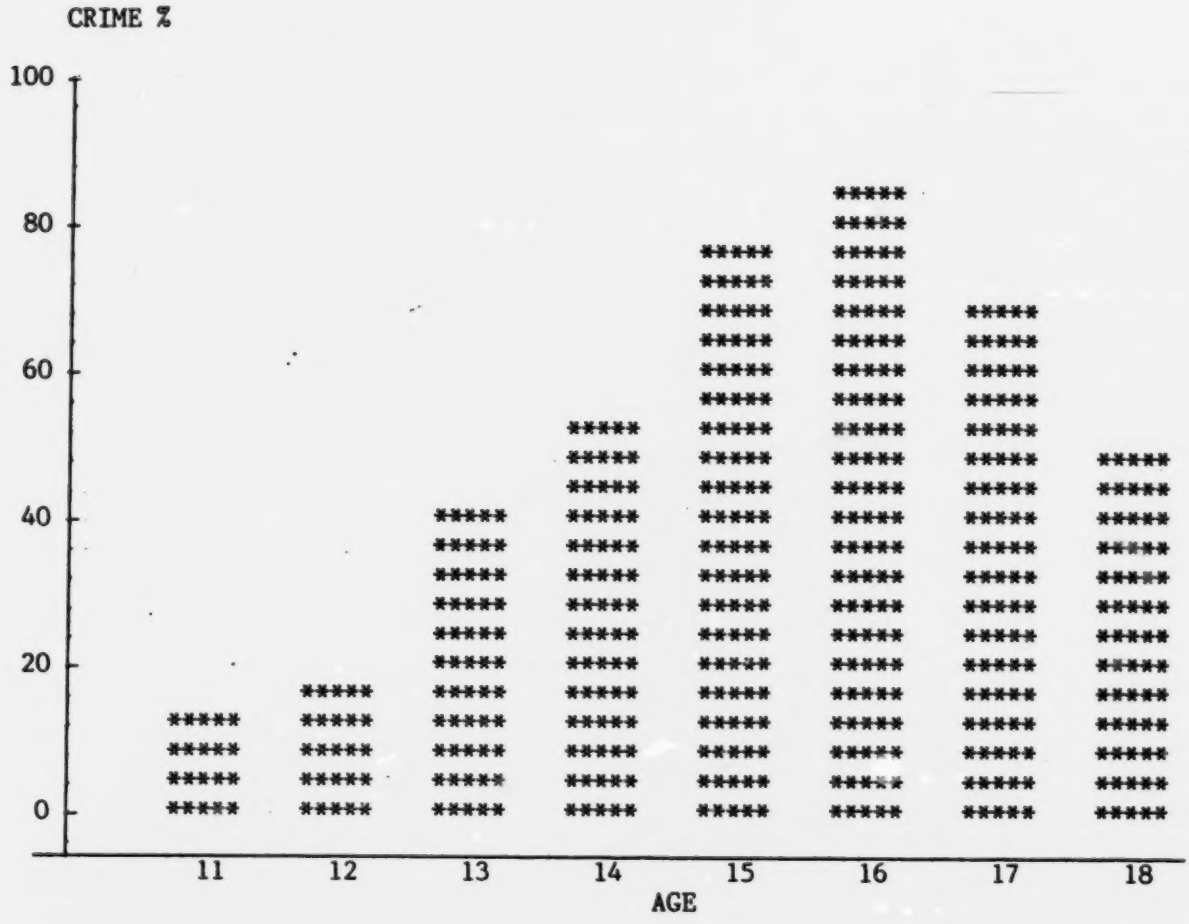

TABLE 1

CORRELATION OF SELECTED VARIABLES WITH
REPORTED TOTAL FREQUENCY OF DELINQUENCY

(N = 337)

	AGE GROUPS		
	YOUNGER (11-13)	MIDDLE (14-16)	OLDER (17-18)
Family Relations			
Control	.41	-.03	-.11
Cohesion	.10	-.18*	-.35**
Conflict	.26	.25***	.31**
Organization	.07	-.17**	-.16
Moral-Religious Emphasis	-.18	-.20**	-.37**
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	-.04	-.22**	-.09
Social Relations			
Social Skill			
Parent	.17	.25***	.25*
Peer	.15	.03	.11
Teacher	.02	.00	.01
Stranger	.10	-.02	.18
Total	.19	.06	.20
Number of Friends	-.22	.02	.18
Vocational Orientation			
Plans More Education	.50**	.19*	.31**
Not Sure of Plans	.15	.04	.30**

*$p < .01$
**$p < .001$
***$p < .0001$